

Twenty-five years ago today, people across the country watched in shock the space shuttle Challenger explode 73 seconds after its launch. Seven lives were lost that day in the name of scientific exploration and, on the 25th anniversary of this national tragedy, we honor the memory of Gregory Jarvis, Christa McAuliffe, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Judith Resnik, Dick Scobee, and Michael J. Smith.

As we reflect on the Challenger disaster, let us also remember the greater mission these heroic Americans dedicated their lives to: pushing the limits of our understanding in service to their country and humanity as a whole. In his State of the Union address, President Obama outlined the need to improve our nation's education system and increase innovation in order to 'win the future.' The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has been a driving force of both over the years, allowing the United States to expand its scientific knowledge and develop new technology and consumer products through research and development. It has inspired countless students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

My home state of Florida has proudly been home to NASA's Kennedy Space Center for almost 50 years. It is clear that the U.S. space program has not only contributed greatly to Florida's economy, but that of the nation as well. NASA provides tens of thousands of jobs throughout the state and the nation.

Despite the important role NASA continues to play in our lives, however, our investments in the program continue to diminish. Last October, the *National Aeronautics and Space Administration Authorization Act of 2010* scaled back many of NASA's programs. This includes bringing to an end the 30-year long era of the space shuttle program when NASA completes its final shuttle mission this year.

The legacy of the space shuttle Challenger crew lives on in the bright minds and courageous hearts of today and the future. As NASA continues to redefine its role in the 21st century, let us not turn our backs on a program that has made the United States a world leader in science and innovation. There is still so much for us to discover, invent, and give back to the world.